UNITED
NATIONS

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General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/51/281
8 August 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-first session
Item 28 of the provisional agenda*

UNIVERSAL CONGRESS ON THE PANAMA CANAL

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/12 of 7 November 1996, in which the Assembly supported the initiative of the Government of Panama in convening the Universal Congress on the Panama Canal, with the participation of Governments, international bodies, public and private academic institutions, maritime users and international shipping companies, to examine jointly the role which the Panama Canal should play in the twenty-first century. The Assembly also requested Member States, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to assist in this undertaking. The present report provides an update on the status of the organization of the Universal Congress on the Panama Canal, to be held at Panama City from 7 to 10 September 1997.

Creation of the Congress Organizing Commission

2. On 25 January 1995, the President of Panama, Mr. Ernesto Pérez Balladares, issued Executive Decree 96, calling for the holding of the Universal Congress on the Panama Canal. Panama's primary objective in hosting the Congress is to prepare for the upcoming transition of the Canal to Panamanian hands. Specifically, the nation hopes to convey the importance of a partnership between the Panamanian Government and the users of the Canal, in order to optimize efficiency and responsiveness in Canal operations.

3. Executive Decree 96 also called for the establishment of an Organizing Commission for the Congress, under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Fernando Manfredo, former Administrator of the Panama Canal Commission, was named President of the Organizing Commission.

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Foundation for the Universal Congress

4. Upon its creation, the first task of the Organizing Commission was the establishment of a statute defining its functions and the mechanisms under which it would operate. One of these mechanisms is the Foundation for the Universal Congress on the Panama Canal. The Foundation has complete control over the financial aspects of the organization of the Congress. The Foundation was established as a private entity under the control of the Government of Panama, in order to facilitate contributions from Member States.

The agenda

5. Another of the primary accomplishments of the Organizing Commission has been the drafting of an agenda which fits within the guidelines of Executive Decree 96 and of General Assembly resolution 50/12. The agenda was drafted after consultations with Governments, international cooperation organizations, public and private universities, maritime organizations and international transportation firms. With inputs from these diverse sources, a provisional agenda was drawn up.

6. Of particular importance has been the inclusion in the agenda of consideration of areas returned to Panamanian control. This will offer an opportunity to outline Panama's progress in planning the rational development of the Canal's basin and the coastal areas. The Congress will provide a forum in which to present the regional plan, currently under discussion, for preservation of the basin and of biodiversity in the Canal area. In the session on "The Panama Canal in the twenty-first century", an updated report will be presented, offering details of the various studies carried out to date regarding options for technological improvements in the Canal.

7. Members of the Organizing Commission are visiting various countries to meet with relevant parties, informing them of the progress in the organization of the event and encouraging them to attend.

The budget

8. The Organizing Commission has drafted a budget proposal for fiscal years 1995, 1996 and 1997, for a total amount of US$ 2.8 million. This budget includes a contribution to the cost of updating the 1993 study of alternatives to the Canal.

Cooperation in organizing the Congress

9. In accordance with resolution 50/12, in which the General Assembly encourages Member States to cooperate with Panama in the organization of the Congress, the Organizing Commission has submitted formal requests to the Governments of the following countries, as well as to the European Union, asking for their collaboration in the Universal Congress: Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America.

10. In addition, progress reports have been presented to the Central American and European parliaments, as well as to the International Maritime Organization. Mr. William O'Neal, Secretary General of IMO, has promised to participate in the Congress as one of the main speakers.

11. As stipulated in resolution 50/12, the Organizing Commission has remained in close contact with the UNDP country office in Panama. One of the main areas of collaboration has been the Commission's important role in assisting UNDP as a facilitator in a national dialogue devoted to the issue of the Panama Canal, involving all sectors of Panamanian society. At the "Panama 2000" meeting, which was held at the Coronado resort from 26 to 28 May 1996, many of the points to be discussed at the Congress were included in the agenda (see annex I). One of the articles of the Final Declaration signed by the leaders of all participating delegations (see annex II) specifically acknowledges the importance of the Universal Congress. The meeting provided an excellent opportunity for Mr. Manfredo to hold private discussions with Mr. Fernando Zumbado, Director of the Latin American Bureau of UNDP, thereby furthering cooperation between the Commission and UNDP.

12. In order to ensure that the logistics of the Congress proceed as planned, the Commission has contracted the services of a British firm, The Seatrade Organization, with 25 years of experience in organizing congresses. The support of this prestigious company generates confidence that the event will run smoothly.

The programme

13. The inaugural session, to be held on 7 September 1997, will serve as a tribute to the roles of France and the United States in making the construction of the Canal possible, as well as to the international community in general for their support in promoting a positive relationship between the United States and Panama. The Panama Canal Treaties provide a guarantee for international commerce that the Panama Canal will remain accessible and neutral after the transition on 31 December 1999.

14. The remainder of the Congress, from 8 to 10 September, is to be held under the theme "Facing the present and preparing for the future". The Congress will be divided into several workshops and a discussion forum, concentrating on three key issues: the transition; the future of the Canal; and investment opportunities.

15. The Organizing Commission aims to assist the Government of Panama in hosting the Universal Congress, thereby contributing to an ongoing effort to bring the users of the Panama Canal closer to this important junction between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans, and to foster their involvement in its management. A strong partnership between Panama and the international community will form one of the cornerstones for the efficient administration of the Panama Canal.

ANNEX I

Agenda: Panama 2000

1. THE TRANSITION: FROM A UNITED STATES CANAL TO A PANAMANIAN CANAL

1.1 New legislation and new organizational structures.

1.2 Retaining the current labour force and recruiting the most qualified personnel available in the labour market.

1.3 Maintaining quality standards in equipment maintenance and personnel training.

1.4 The Canal: threats and weaknesses. Ship security.

1.5 Foreign military presence vs. effective uses for the areas. Presence, conversion and new uses.

1.6 Keeping client confidence.

1.7 Canal diagnosis.

2. THE CANAL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: FUTURE CHALLENGES

2.1 Long-term transit projections (2060).

2.2 Results of the 1993 study on alternatives to the Canal.

2.3 Possible investments to meet projected demand. Widening of the Gaillart Cut, technological changes, the third set of locks.

3. GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNABILITY

A guarantee of political and legal stability for the Canal's users and the international community.

ANNEX II

[Original: English]

National vision

"Panama 2000 ... and beyond": a vision of the future, a current commitment

In the twentieth century, the struggle of the people of Panama resulted in the recovery of the Panama Canal and its adjacent areas. During the twenty-first century, Panama must integrate the Canal in the national development process. Facing the new millennium, we, the representatives of the political parties, civilian organizations, and the Government share this "national vision" of the Panama we want to see as we enter the twenty-first century.

First: Our long-term vision focuses on strategic objectives for national development, without ignoring current problems. Our focus is on addressing the issues of the State's agenda, according to the wishes of the people.

Second: Our national vision, "Panama 2000 ... and beyond", aims high, with optimism, hope and faith in our ability as a nation.

We commit ourselves to development objectives based on equality and equity, that may serve as the decisive element to modernize the country, making progress accessible to a great many of those who are presently excluded, and to achieving a significant reduction in poverty.

We commit ourselves to consolidating a State ruled by law, in which all the political forces feel that they can be elected to public office by democratic means; to a full implementation of the constitutional mandate to demilitarize the country; and to achieving complete transparency in the operation of public and private institutions.

We commit ourselves to promoting the strengthening of democratic governance that includes the participation of the citizenry, with the State being a true guarantor of social equilibrium and of respect for our characteristic cultural diversity, so that the nation's interests may prevail over all others.

Third: In the light of this national vision, the political parties are responsible for presenting to the public their government programmes and the manner in which they propose to achieve such programmes. This will allow the citizenry to assess the performance of each administration.

Fourth: A historic milestone in our nation's development will be reached on 31 December 1999. After almost a century in which successive generations of Panamanians have given voice to our national aspirations, the aspiration to be the sovereign owners of our resources, our Canal and its adjacent areas for the progress and well-being of all will come to full fruition. We therefore recognize that the subject of the Canal is a State issue, and moreover, that it transcends a particular agenda.

This also involves the obligation to manage the Canal effectively, a challenge we must meet and a duty we must fulfil for our own sake, for the integral development of the country, and for the international community.

Like all great opportunities, it also involves a great risk: If we fail, we will have impaired the future viability of our nation.

Fifth: The Panama Canal is a world enterprise that operates under the majority and effective direction of Panamanian citizens, and must be integrated into the country's historic destiny, as an essential part of its full development. Therefore, it is essential that all activities related to the Interoceanic waterway and their interrelation with other government institutions should be coordinated.

Sixth: The Panamanian employees of the Canal must assume the leadership in the management and operation of our country's largest asset. The citizenry hopes and trusts that, through their role in the Canal enterprise, they will support the process of modernizing the country.

An increasing participation of women in all operational levels in the management of the Canal must also be effectively supported.

Seventh: The political parties, the civil society and the Government recognize that the following agreements are vital to achieving our country's objectives:

(a) To guarantee the exclusion of party or sectoral policy interests from the decisions pertaining to the Panama Canal Authority;

(b) That the draft of the Organic Law of the Panama Canal Authority must be broadly debated at the national level prior to its submission to the Legislative Assembly;

(c) The Panama Canal Authority Law must guarantee the labour rights and conditions of Canal employees;

(d) To promote formal and informal communicative and educational processes aimed at awareness-raising, guidance and education of the Panamanian population regarding the Canal and the areas reverting to Panama;

(e) The certainty that the members of the Board of Directors of the Panama Canal Authority, as well as the Administrator and the Deputy Administrator, must be appointed solely on the basis of their skills, merits and integrity. Their wide representativeness will constitute the best guarantee of continuity far beyond the election dates;

(f) The conduct of an electoral process in 1999, which is as transparent as that of 1994, in accordance with the provisions and the schedule established in our Constitution, and under the supervision of any national and international organization wishing to observe such elections;

(g) The conservation of the ecological heritage of the interoceanic region, as a guarantee of the sustainability of the Panama Canal;

(h) The need for and desirability of holding meetings as soon as possible, in order to consider:

(i) The draft of the Panama Canal Authority Law;

(ii) The General Land-use Plan and the Regional Plan of the Interoceanic Regional Authority;

(iii) The conversion and reutilization of the military bases.

Eighth: We express our interest in participating actively in the Universal Congress on the Panama Canal, scheduled for 7 to 10 September 1997. Both this event and its preparatory meetings should serve to provide the citizenry and the international community with clear information on the national decisions and projects agreed upon for the administration and improvement of the Panama Canal.

Ninth: With the approval of this vision of "Panama 2000 ... and beyond", Panamanians will have a great certainty that we are on the right course, a diversified and plural course, but one whose objectives are shared by all the citizens of our nation.

Tenth: To promote a forum for ongoing national dialogue and interactive debate regarding the Canal, with the participation of Panamanian civil society and political parties.

Eleventh: This document is supplemented by the reports submitted by each Working Group.

Coronado, 28 May 1996

Political parties:

(Signed) Jorge FLORES
Partido Nacionalista Popular

(Signed) Joaquín José Vallarino
Movimiento de Renovación Nacional

(Signed) Carlos ABADÍA
Partido de Renovación Civilista

(Signed) Francisco SANCHEZ CARDENAS
Partido Revolucionario Democrático

(Signed) Ruben AROSEMENA
Partido Democrata Cristiano

(Signed) Gloria YOUNG
Movimiento Papa Egoró

(Signed) Ramón MORALES
Movimiento Liberal Republicano Nacionalista

(Signed) Simón TEJEIRA
Partido de Solidaridad

Civil society:

(Signed) Berta TEJEIRA
Women in Political Parties Forum

(Signed) Lina BOZA
Panama Canal Workers' Union

(Signed) Josué CÁCERES
Association of Small- and Medium-Scale Producers

(Signed) William BARRIGÓN
National Coordinator for the Indigenous Peoples of Panama

(Signed) Octavio TAPIA
Council of Rectors

(Signed) Mons. José DIMAS CEDEÑO
Catholic Church

(Signed) Euclides TEJADA
National Council of Cooperatives

(Signed) Mariano MENA
National Council of Organized Workers

(Signed) Víctor M. LEWIS
National Private Enterprise Council

(Signed) Mariela ARCE
Women and Development Forum

(Signed) Roberto BRUNEAU
Ecumenical Council

(Signed) Raúl LEIS
Academic Groups

(Signed) Luis Alberto DÍAZ
Mass Media Associations

(Signed) Eduardo VALLARINO
Labour Foundation

National Government:

(Signed) Ricardo Alberto ARIAS
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Moderator:

(Signed) Belisario BETANCUR
Former President of Colombia